

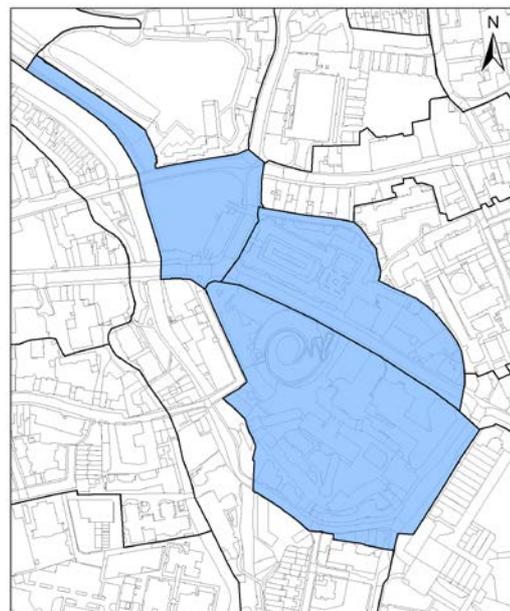
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 12:  
CASTLE AND PERIPHERY- OXFORD CASTLE**

**The HUCA is located within broad character Zone D: Castle and periphery.**

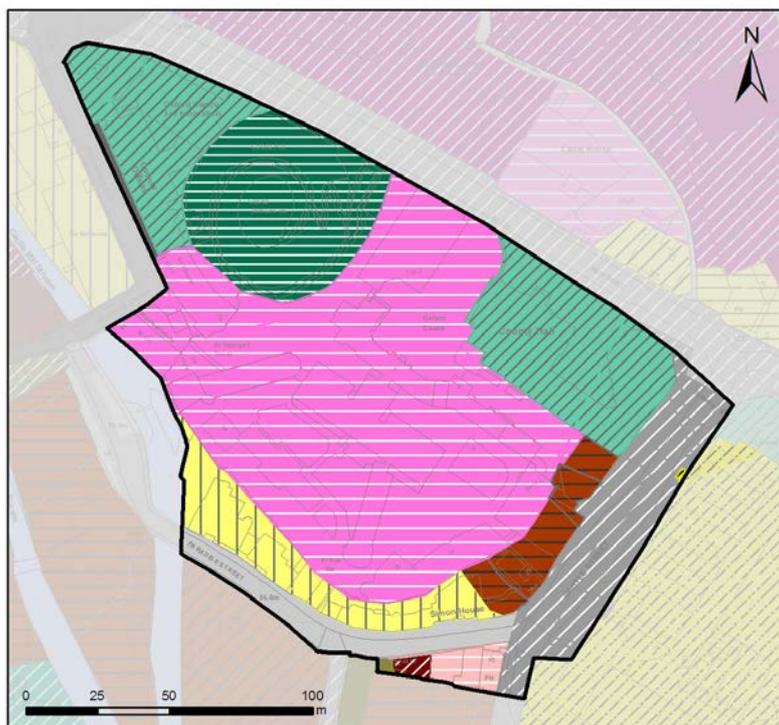
*The broad character zone is defined by the extent of the Norman castle defences and includes part of the former canal basin located to the north.*

**Summary characteristics**

- Dominant period: Mixture of medieval, post-medieval and modern.
- Designations: Oxford Castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County No 21701). Two Grade I, three Grade II\*, eight Grade II listings. Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Interest: Potential for further Late Saxon, Norman, medieval, post-medieval remains and later prison remains. Specific features of note include the remains of the Saxon street grid, settlement and defences, the Norman and later castle precinct, defences, Church of St Budoc and the Collegiate Chapel of St George. The area also includes the site of the medieval Shire Court and the 18<sup>th</sup> century prison complex. The area has exceptional potential for well preserved waterlogged remains and for human burials of Saxon, medieval and post-medieval date including the remains of prisoners thrown into the castle ditch. The built fabric of medieval well house, the St Georges Tower, the 12<sup>th</sup> rebuilt crypt of the Collegiate Chapel and the 18<sup>th</sup> century prison are also of notable interest.
- Character: Modern leisure, retail and heritage complex of stone built structures carefully integrated with medieval and post-medieval fabric of the motte, St Georges Tower and the 18<sup>th</sup> century prison.
- Spaces: The site contains a series of paved yards and squares which utilise historic spaces and allow public access through the complex. The fenced Norman mound is a focal green space with controlled public access. A grassed roof garden also provides green infrastructure.
- Road Morphology: Castle Street is a



Castle and Periphery (Zone D)  
© Crown Copyright and database right 2011. Ordnance Survey 100019348.



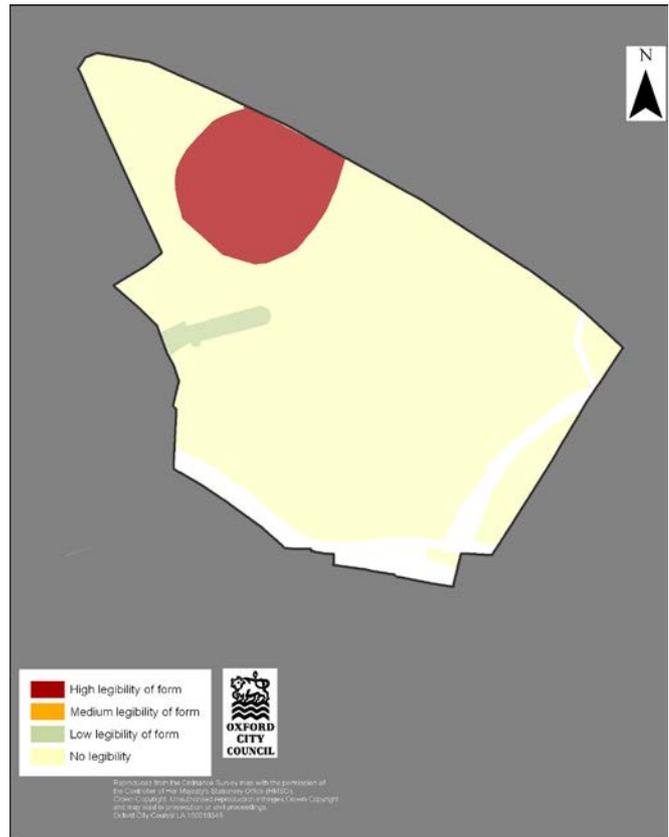
© Crown Copyright and database right 2011. Ordnance Survey 100019348.

HUCA 12 OAP Characterisation	
	Townhouses
	Victorian Terraces 1850-1900
	Blocks of Flats 1945-1980
	Civic
	Modern shopping centre
	Offices post 1945
	Inns pre 1800
	Leisure
	Castle
	Medieval medium distance route
	Lane
	Modern Roads

**Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.**

modern straight road inserted when the Westgate was built. The medieval Paradise Street to the south reflects the former line of the castle defences.

- Plot Morphology: The site includes a number of large regular and irregular plots for post-medieval and modern civic and commercial buildings, although the 18<sup>th</sup> century prison layout captured elements of the medieval castle orientation and morphology, incorporating St George's Tower, the crypt of the Collegiate Chapel of St George and the Norman motte. The wider morphology of the 'Castle Quarter' also captures elements of the medieval defences.
- The natural topography of the area is Northmoor First Terrace rising sharply from a height of 58m OD on the east bank of the Castle Mill Stream to a height of 63m OD at the Westgate Centre.
- Survival of townscape elements:
  - Late Saxon St George's Tower.
  - The Norman crypt of the Collegiate Chapel of St George at the Castle (rebuilt).
  - Reconsolidated stretch of the Late Saxon town wall under the former Carluccio's Restaurant.
  - The Norman Castle mound and its 13<sup>th</sup> century well house.
  - Elements of the post-medieval prison (c1785-1805) including the entrance range (now MalMaison Hotel); C and D wings (Now Oxford Unlocked Heritage Centre); the 19<sup>th</sup> century A wing and Governors House, the Governors Office, the Tread wheel building and the perimeter wall.
  - Paradise Street retains part of the medieval street pattern.
  - The County Hall and former assize courts c1839-31 (Neo-Norman in style).
  - Registry Office Building (built 1910, architect William Daft).



### Assessment of medieval tenement survival



### Description

The Oxford Castle Quarter is a coherent area of medieval, post-medieval and modern development comprising of a luxury hotel, flats, restaurants, bars and heritage centre, located

---

around and within surviving elements of the Norman Castle precinct and later 18<sup>th</sup> century prison complex. The area also includes the 19<sup>th</sup> century County Hall, its large multi-storey replacement (built in 1974) and the City Registry Office. The area is bounded by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century turnpike New Road to the north, the arc of the Castle Mill Stream to the west, the medieval Paradise Street to the south and the 1960s Castle Street to the east.

### **Historical value- means of connecting with the past**

A defended burh was established at Oxford by the early 10<sup>th</sup> century. The exact sequence of its construction and extension remains unclear. By the time of the Norman Conquest the defended Saxon town extended as far as St Georges Tower, which is now thought to be Late Saxon in date. A Norman motte and bailey were inserted over the western street grid of the Saxon town in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century (c1071), evidently an act of intimidation and domination by the Normans. The Domesday survey records many towns tenements as waste, testifying to initial impact of the invasion, although the town appears to have recovered quickly and experience economic growth in the late 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, centred around trade in cloth and leather products. The Norman castle precinct also incorporated the 11<sup>th</sup> century Collegiate Chapel of St George at the Castle, the earliest collegiate institution in the town. The chapel was founded in 1074 by Robert D'Oilly and Roger D'Ivri and likely only functioned as a college until 1149 when it was granted to Osney Abbey. It is associated with, amongst others, Geoffrey of Monmouth, who popularised the Arthurian Romances. By the 12<sup>th</sup> century the castle precinct and its defensive ditch had been established. The precinct morphology subsequently dominated the west end of Oxford until the construction of New Street through the precinct in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Although a key defensive position during the Anarchy when Queen Matilda was besieged here by King Stephen, by the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, the castles importance as a military structure diminished and it served as the town and later county gaol and site of the Shire Hall where the county assizes were held. There are records of repeated efforts to repair the buildings in the medieval period. The castle was refortified and garrisoned during the English Civil War but was eventually slighted by Parliamentary troops. It remained the site of the Gaol and the prison buildings were later repaired and extended. In the 1770's a Prison report by John Howard condemned the buildings, stating that years of neglect had made them unfit for human habitation. The site was re-acquired by the government and redeveloped. The austere 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings, some of which were designed by Prison architect William Blackburn, survive as parts of the Castle Unlocked Heritage Centre and Malmaison Hotel. In 1800 the site became home to a new County Hall and a remodelled County Gaol and Court. The prison comprised of the Debtors' Tower, the Governor's House and Office, A, B, C and D Wings, Punishment Cells and an Exercise Yard. It remained open until 1996.

The post-medieval period saw development over the castle ditch. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the New Road and the canal basin further encroached on the precinct and its periphery. A new County Hall and former assize courts were built fronting onto New Road c1839-31.

The character area contains exceptional structures which are illustrative of the economic success of the Late Saxon town, of the Norman seizure and domination of Oxford, of the early traditions of leaning associated with the collegiate chapel and of the austere character of 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century penal system. The character area also illustrates processes reflecting medieval, post-medieval and modern civic governance, as distinct from University and colleges which dominate the eastern and northern parts of the city.



**View towards the motte and St George's Tower.**

---

### **Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence**

This character area has the potential to preserve further significant evidence for the Saxon, medieval, post-medieval and modern periods. The Urban Archaeological Database records forty-four archaeological events within the character area. Early investigations recorded walls and the foundations of two towers and several substantial wells filled with rubbish during the 18<sup>th</sup> century cutting of New Road. Evidence for Late Saxon occupation has been recorded on a number of occasions since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century when excavations revealed evidence for Saxon streets and frontage buildings. Major excavations undertaken prior to the redevelopment of the Castle Quarter between 1999 and 2005 recorded extensive evidence for a well populated Late Saxon western quarter, including the remains of a large hall, the Saxon town wall, rampart and also burials cut into the rampart.

Excavations have also revealed evidence for the composition of the Norman motte and examined its ditch and the remains of the later 12<sup>th</sup> century stone tower which replaced an earlier wooden tower. The outer precinct ditch has been excavated with evidence from the fill indicating that it remained at least partially open throughout the medieval period with sporadic dumping of waste material including leather and wooden artefacts. A substantial wall built of ragstone, thought to be the curtain wall of the precinct, has been recorded on several occasions. The now demolished barbican and nearby former Church of St Budoc have also been investigated. Investigations have also encountered medieval inhumations associated with the Collegiate Chapel of St George, also a rectangular stone structure and hearth which may be the remains of the medieval Shire Hall. Stretches of the 18<sup>th</sup> century prison wall have been recorded and more gruesomely sixty-four inhumations dated to the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century were recovered from the castle ditch, evidently former inmates of the prison.

### **Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation**

The character area has a strong aesthetic value being dominated by the Norman motte set within the remodelled castle and prison precinct. The motte stands over 20m high and provides an important focal point and viewing platform with views to the surrounding hills. The built character is now strongly defined by the post-medieval former prison and its re-used buildings. The large new structures have high quality finishing and sympathetic designs that contribute to the aesthetic quality of the area. The scale and arrangement of the new development has carefully respected the integrity of the historic structures. The Castle Quarter has a number of public squares and contains multiple public access points. The precinct buildings are predominantly of limestone stone with some glass fronted and steel structures. The area has a moderate building density with former prison yards, access roads and the grassed spaces creating a series of enclosed but joined areas. The historic depth and variety of architectural styles on display has a strong sensory impact and provides notably intellectual stimulation. Two notable mature trees are located on the castle mound.

### **Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory**

The Castle Quarter is now a communal focal point in the West End which is subject to a wider regeneration project. The quarter provides improved access, restaurants, markets and events, luxury hotel provision and the Oxford Castle Unlocked visitor experience, which including access to St Georges Tower the Prison D wing and the Norman motte. Oxford prison only closed at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and together with the various civic functions undertaken in this area can be argued to have a strong place in the collective experience and memory of the town. The County Council Offices and Registry



**View towards The Malmaison Hotel  
(former 18<sup>th</sup> century prison)**

Office which continue a history of municipal administration that dates back to the Norman period. The quarter is accessible, well signed and regularly supports open air touring art and heritage exhibits and public events. The area also contains a key-learning centre, which is an important educational resource.

**Version:18/2/2012**

